

---

## Your Submission SSM-D-21-02103

---

Susan J. Elliott <em@editorialmanager.com>  
Reply-To: "Susan J. Elliott" <ssmedassist@uwaterloo.ca>  
To: "Paez, Antonio" <paezha@mcmaster.ca>

Tue, Aug 17, 2021 at 3:41 PM

Ref: SSM-D-21-02103

Manuscript Title: Changes in accessibility to food banks and food services during COVID-19 and implications for low income populations in Hamilton, Ontario  
Social Science & Medicine

Dear Prof. Paez,

Thank you for submitting your manuscript to *Social Science & Medicine* (SSM). We have now completed its review and attach the comments of the reviewers. Your paper is of potential interest, but, based on the reviewers' comments appended at the bottom of this email, we are unable to accept your manuscript in its present form. As you will see, our reviewers raised a number of suggestions for revision and clarification.

If you feel able to respond to these suggestions, we would be willing to consider a revised submission. Please submit your revision through the on-line system by Sep 17, 2021.

If we have not heard from you by this date, then we will assume you do not wish to submit a revision and your manuscript will be withdrawn. If you feel you will need more time to revise and re-submit your paper, then please let us know immediately. Extensions to resubmission deadlines are only granted in exceptional circumstances.

To submit a revision, visit [this webpage](#) and click 'log in' at the top of the page. There you will see a menu item called "Submissions Needing Revision". You will find your submission record there. When submitting your revision, you will be asked to upload a Response to the reviewers' comments. Please also include a document that highlights the tracked changes made to your original submission.

If you do not wish to revise your submission please follow the instructions above to log in to your "Submissions Needing Revision" space where you will have the option to decline this invitation to revise.

We ask all our authors to consider the points below as a guide to submitting revised submissions:

### Required files

When submitting your revised paper, we ask that you include the following items:

1. **Response to Reviewers:** A separate file labelled "Response to Reviewers" that carefully addresses, point-by-point, the issues raised in the comments appended below, including those of the Editorial Office, if any. You should also include a suitable rebuttal to any specific request for change that you have not made. Mention the page, paragraph, and line number of any revisions that are made. Please do not include any author identifying information in this file as it is viewed by reviewers.
2. **Manuscript and Figure Source Files:** At revision stage, we cannot accommodate PDF files for production purposes. We also ask that you upload a tracked changes version of your manuscript, as well as a clean copy. Figures and tables must be uploaded as a separate file(s) at this stage for production purposes, too. We would discourage you from embedding these figures and tables within the main manuscript file as well, to prevent repetition and any errors that may come from duplication of such files. Refer to the [SSM Guide for Authors](#) for additional information.
3. **Highlights:** A short collection of bullet points that convey the core findings of the article and should be submitted as a separate file. Please use 'Highlights' in the file name and include 3 to 5 bullet points (maximum 85 characters, including spaces, per bullet point). See the following [website](#) for more information.

For additional details regarding acceptable file formats, please refer to the [SSM Guide for Authors](#).

### Further considerations for revised submissions:

1. There must be NO author identifying information in the main text manuscript and supporting documents i.e., Response to Reviewers. Acknowledgements should be submitted as a separate file, which reviewers will not see.

2. Keep in mind that standard SSM style when citing multiple citations is to do so alphabetically. For assistance on formatting references, please visit our Guide for Author's page [here](#).
3. Please remember that the combined word length of your abstract, tables, and references as well as the main text of all resubmissions should remain within our word limit. Exceeding these limits should only occur with the Editor's consent.
4. Please remember that SSM does NOT publish endnotes or footnotes.
5. When uploading new documents to replace old ones, please remove the old ones, as we already have these saved in our system.
6. Please ensure your manuscript is double-spaced and each page is numbered. Line numbering will be automatically generated by the system.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,

Susan J. Elliott, PhD

Senior Editor

*Social Science & Medicine*

Additional comments from the Editors and Reviewers (if any):

Reviewer #1: Overall, I found the paper well-written and clear. I did have some concerns, primarily with the paper's framing and the conclusions drawn:

1. The characterization of the emergency food services included is a little unclear. It seems until the table on page 10 that the focus is on food banks, but really it looks like the focus is on ALL emergency food provision (including communal meal services). The framing of the piece is therefore a little "off", as meal programs have a much longer history (pre-Victorian) than food banks, and are intended to support a somewhat different clientele (e.g., those without kitchen/cooking facilities, and usually "singles" rather than families). I think it would make sense for the authors to use the broader term "emergency food services" in the title and throughout, and to change the framing at the beginning (please note that I don't think it is necessary to go into the history of emergency food provision here at all really... but the current presentation beginning with food banks is misleading).
2. Relatedly, the conflation of food banks and meal programs is a bit of a challenge in terms of interpreting the data. For example, one would EXPECT congregate dining to essentially shut down during the pandemic, as this could be a route for disease spread. In some cases, some kind of food services may have continued to be offered (e.g., through takeout), but in general closures would be expected. In the food BANKS, however, the mode of delivery might need to be modified slightly, but direct impacts of covid would be less significant. Additionally, as mentioned above these services target different demographics. So, by conflating these two modes of food delivery, the utility of the analysis is compromised.
3. The presentation of data in relation to food security is a bit confusing, as data from pre-covid, during covid, and from both the U.S. and Canada is presented. This makes it a little challenging to draw out the contemporary situation in the study area, and should be presented more clearly (and given that they seem to have food security data from May 2020, and there is widely available data from 2018 as well, they SHOULD be able to give a clearer sense of how much food security has increased during the pandemic in Canada). Also, I think comparisons to the situation in the U.S. during covid should be made cautiously, as their social interventions have been very different than Canada's (and in both countries, responses have varied widely by state/province).
4. Overall, the paper seems longer than it needs to be in the introduction/context and conclusion sections - there is quite a bit of background that seems unnecessary, and unnecessary restatement of that material in the conclusion.
5. I disagree strongly with the author's conclusion that the "solution" is to create more uniform geographical coverage of emergency food programs. I think what this data shows more than anything is that - as is mentioned throughout the literature on food banks, starting with Janet Poppendieck's "Sweet Charity" (a key text not included here) and continued in the work of Val Tarasuk and others - food banks are an ineffective, inefficient (not to mention stigmatizing) solution to hunger at the best of times, and that during a crisis (when they are most needed) they are even LESS able to provide the services required. To me, the data here highlights strongly the need for an effective social safety net (including decent EI support that is rolled out quickly, and paid sick days, both of which have been partially improved but also subjects of contestation in Ontario/Canada during the pandemic) that would make food banks redundant. That said, there may still be a place for emergency food services as part of a "community service hub" model that helps people with their immediate

needs while connecting them with longer-term supports (and having these give good geographic coverage would make sense). But overall I think this data proves that food banks are NOT effective in emergencies (at least of the pandemic type) and so we should be looking elsewhere for solutions rather than increasing our investments in this sector.

Specific comments:

Pg 2 paragraph 2 - a little unclear which of the data presented is pre-covid and which is during covid

Pg 2 ln 46 (and also pg 21 ln 33) - were 40% of actual visitors children, or are they extrapolating from households with children? It seems unlikely that parents are actually bringing their children along, so "visitors" may be the wrong word ("users"?)

Pg 4 paragraph 1 - not sure there is much evidence that connects food insecurity (which is usually "mild" in relation to true hunger/severe food insecurity) in developed nations with nutrient deficiency? If so, this should be shared. If not, the argument should be clarified in relation to known outcomes (e.g., stress, obesity)

Pg 4 paragraph 2 - not sure that food banks include meal programs/prepared meals (the food BANK wouldn't, although the organization might offer both)

Pg 5 ln 27 - seems to imply that the U.S. experience of increasing food insecurity during the pandemic is true in Canada, but the U.S. context in terms of emergency income relief is very different, and the May 2020 statistic of 14.7% is not contextualised (is this an increase? From what?)

Pg 23 (last page) - would be nice to have a final concluding sentence that restates the contribution of the paper, rather than ending with limitations.

## **Other Optional Revised Submission Files:**

### **MethodsX file:**

We invite you to submit a method article alongside your research article. This is an opportunity to get full credit for the time and money you have spent on developing research methods, and to increase the visibility and impact of your work. If your research article is accepted, your method article will be automatically transferred over to the open access journal, MethodsX, where it will be editorially reviewed and published as a separate method article upon acceptance. Both articles will be linked on ScienceDirect. Please use the MethodsX template available [here](#) when preparing your article. Open access fees apply.

### **AudioSlides:**

Please note that this journal offers a new, free service called AudioSlides: brief, webcast-style presentations that are shown next to published articles on ScienceDirect ([see also](#)). If your paper is accepted for publication, you will automatically receive an invitation to create an AudioSlides presentation.

### **Interactive Plot Viewer:**

Interactive Plots provide easy access to the data behind plots. To include one with your article, please prepare a .csv file with your plot data and test it [online](#) before submission as supplementary material. See [also](#).

### **Interactive Data Visualizations:**

Include interactive data visualizations in your publication and let your readers interact and engage more closely with your research. Follow the instructions [here](#) to find out about available data visualization options and how to include them with your article.

For further assistance, please visit Elsevier's [customer support site](#). Here you can search for solutions on a range of topics, find answers to frequently asked questions and learn more about Editorial Manager via interactive tutorials. You will also find our 24/7 support contact details should you need any further assistance from one of our representatives.

#AU\_SSM#

To ensure this email reaches the intended recipient, please do not delete the above code

---

*In compliance with data protection regulations, you may request that we remove your personal registration details at any time. [\(Remove my information/details\)](#). Please contact the publication office if you have any questions.*